



Peter McLaren and Gustavo Fischman

Organic Intellectuals

Father Joe Falkiner (featured in the previous course post) also mentions Gramsci, and **organic intellectuals**. The main item today in this penultimate part of our current course has the long title: “Rethinking Critical Pedagogy and the Gramscian and Freirean Legacies: From Organic to Committed Intellectuals or Critical Pedagogy, Commitment, and Praxis”. It is by Gustavo Fischman and [Peter McLaren](#), who are present-day exponents of [Critical Pedagogy](#), or in other words what is referred to by Joe Falkiner as “the educational methods of Paulo Friere”.

The McLaren/Fischman article immediately starts to grapple with “the notion of teachers as transformative intellectuals”. We are back with Cyril Smith’s problem with Lenin – the problem of the legitimacy or otherwise of “outside agitators” – and the problem of Marx's aim of “development of communist consciousness on a mass scale” (which Cyril Smith somehow managed to simultaneously approve of).

How are you going to make revolution, if the maker of revolution must be the masses, and not yourself?

Alternatively, if you had a method of educating the masses, what else would you need in the way of revolution? Is there any difference between politics and political education? Or is it a trinity that is at the same time a unity, namely: Educate, Organise, Mobilise?

Paulo Freire concentrated his intellectual fire on the single most practical priority, which at the same time requires the deepest philosophical clarity, and called it “**The Pedagogy of the Oppressed**”.

Fischman and McLaren make clear, by reference to Gramsci, that such a Pedagogy of the Oppressed is a direct form of class struggle. It is a direct confrontation with the interests of the bourgeois state. It is an open contradiction of the bourgeois class dictatorship as applied through state-led education as well as through the instructive function of the judiciary.

The authors note that Gramsci is often misappropriated ([see also CU](#)). They write: *“Because Gramsci identified civil society as an arena used by the ruling class to exert its hegemony over the society, the struggle for Gramsci was not to transform civil society but rather, as Holst points out, ‘to build proletarian hegemony’.”* That is, proletarian ascendancy, also known as the dictatorship of the proletariat.

Fischman and McLaren are rejecting the view of “hegemony” as

a “Third Way” that could by-pass revolutionary confrontation.

After discussing Gramsci’s organic intellectuals, and as if to answer Cyril Smith’s doubts, they quote Gramsci as follows:

“Critical self-consciousness means, historically and politically, the construction of an elite of intellectuals. A human mass does not ‘distinguish’ itself, does not become independent in its own right without, in the widest sense, organizing itself; and there is no organization without intellectuals, that is without organizers and leaders, in other words, without the theoretical aspect of the theory-practice nexus being distinguished concretely by the existence of a group of ‘specialized’ in conceptual and philosophical elaboration of ideas.”

Fischman and McLaren go on to argue for the “committed intellectual”, with “an unwavering commitment to the struggle against injustice”. What is the difference between a committed intellectual and a communist cadre? No difference at all! In that sense, what McLaren and Fischman have managed to do is to compose a very elegant justification of **the vanguard party**, rooted in the most profound philosophy.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [Organic Intellectuals, 2005, McLaren and Fischman.](#)
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here.](#)